



the prayer that might have been

This homily is unusual in that it is not based upon any scripture passage. Rather, it is a prayer, or, as the title suggest, a prayer that might have been. It is my response to the 2015 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' unfortunate policy regarding gay couples and their innocent children.

O Lord, thou has invited us to reason with thou "even as a man reasoneth one with another face to face."¹ We, who are "but dust and ashes," now take "upon [ourselves] to speak unto the Lord."² "O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant[s] because of [their] weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires."³

O Lord, we, the people of thy Church, are so very richly blessed; blessed even according to the faithful blessing pronounced upon our Father Abraham when thou said, "I will bless thee, and make thy name great."⁴ We know that, according to the words of one who walked amongst us as an apostle, "the ratio of... blessings to our comparatively minuscule obedience is a very, very generous ratio indeed."⁵ When we consider our weakness as leaders and as a people, we are truly astonished by thy willingness to and pleasure in blessing us so bountifully.

Therefore, we are not self-righteous about our blessedness. We do not imagine that we are

¹ DC 50.¹¹

² Genesis 18.²⁷

³ Ether 3.²

⁴ Genesis 12.²

⁵ Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, August 2000, p. 8

blessed because we are more righteous than others. No, we are fully aware and amazed by the truth that thou, “maketh [thy] sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust,”⁶ We know, O Lord, that this saying of our Savior is but a metaphor for thy bountiful willingness to bless outside of and beyond that which is “deserved” in all kinds of amazing and creative ways that reach well beyond the temporal and mundane to the spiritual and sacred.

Nor are we insecure or jealous of our blessings. We are no hoarders of blessings, O Lord. We do not hold them tightly to our chest and refuse to share them. We take seriously the Abrahamic promise that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”⁷ Surely this promise that we *BE* a blessing is the greatest blessing that thou has bestowed upon us! We sense that we are only Abraham’s children and faithful followers of Christ to the degree that we fulfil this, our sacred obligation, nay, our cherished privilege to bless and not curse. Therefore, we do not look for reasons to withhold blessings from any of thy children, but look for reasons to pronounce whatever blessings we can upon as many as we can.

And now, O Lord, if we err in this our understanding and desires, please forgive us. If we appear too magnanimous, forgive us! We only seek, however imperfectly, to follow thy example. Thou hast said through the inspired Psalmist that thy mercy is as expansive as the heavens are high above the earth.”⁸ We know this is very great, O Lord. If we have misunderstood; if it is only thy prerogative to act with boundless mercy; if we seek to act too mercifully, OH, LORD, FORGIVE US!

But we must try, O Lord. We must ask. We must. We must plead and advocate for all thy children. This, our advocacy, must extend to our gay brothers and sisters. We can’t do otherwise. To play it safe, entrench and retreat into the safety of the traditional past, would be more than inhumane. It would be to act as something less than prophetic. It would be an insult upon, a kind of throwing off of our cherished heritage as the children of Abraham, and our weighty prophetic mantle.

Please forgive our forwardness, O Lord, but our hearts are full-drawn out to our dear gay brothers and sisters. We don’t mean to counsel thee. We don’t pretend to inform or even remind

⁶ Matthew 5.⁴⁵

⁷ Genesis 12.³

⁸ Psalm 103.¹¹

thee, as if thou were weakly mortal as we. We only seek, imperfectly, no doubt, to do as thou hast requested, and speak with thee, as one man speaks to another. Please do not be angry if we take it upon ourselves to remind thee of the utterly surprising, highly imaginative, shockingly daring, and inspiringly compassionate example of our father, Abraham, who took such risk before thee as to plead and advocate for the cities of the plains, among them Sodom and Gomorrah, upon whom thou had unambiguously pronounced destruction.

“And Abraham drew near, and said, ‘Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? *That be far from thee to do after this manner*, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*’

“And the LORD said, ‘If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.’

And Abraham answered and said, ‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?’

“And he said, ‘If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.’

“And he spake unto him yet again, and said, ‘Peradventure there shall be forty found there.’

“And he said, ‘I will not do it for forty's sake.’

“And he said unto him, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there.’

“And he said, ‘I will not do it, if I find thirty there.’

“And he said, ‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there.’

“And he said, ‘I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.’

“And he said, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there.’

“And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.”⁹

And so, O Lord, we seek, as children of Abraham and followers of thy Only Begotten Son, to follow Abraham’s example, whatever risk to ourselves it may entail. We advocate for those that thou seem to have cursed. We ask if there might not yet be a blessing for our gay brothers and sisters, even those who have chosen to marry, contrary to our understanding of thy desires. Let us speak to thee of them.

Now, there are those among us who would have us pronounce gay men and women, especially those who dare marry, anathema. They would have us go further and pronounce anathema upon their children.

But we hesitate. Our hesitancy, as we have already said, flows from an awareness of thy bountiful mercy and surprising willingness to bless. We also hesitate, frankly, out of personal and institutional humility. We have, we confess, been most fallible, O Lord. We spent more than a decade teaching, and even testifying in the name of the Lord Jesus, that individuals *choose to BE gay*. They choose, we claimed, to be attracted to individuals of the same gender. They were not born with such confusion of thoughts and feelings, we declared. We pray for forgiveness for having taken thy name in vain in this thing. We have openly confessed our error. We have, by acknowledging that this attraction is not always a choice, publicized our initial error on social media for all to see. We sorrow that our error now causes some to wonder if we are not yet once more speaking vainly. We must humbly acknowledge that we have perhaps created this uncertainty by our own past actions and vain words. We, rather than the confused, are surely partially to blame for the confusion.

At the same time, we initially misunderstood the new openness about same gender attraction. In fact, we spoke very differently about it. Our language gives away our ignorance. We did not speak of “same gender attraction,” but as “homo-sexuality.” What we meant and what we thought was that this new openness simply sought license to feed fleshly lusts and yield to raw, hedonistic sexual lusts and their accompanying sexual acts. It was just about physical pleasures. Sex.

We did not know then, as we do now, that it was about *attraction*, often quite independent of

⁹ Genesis 18.²³⁻³²

“sex;” that it was about the real and natural human need to form meaningful and lasting connections. We did not think of it as reflecting the human need to not be lonely and alone. We, ourselves, are grateful for our eternal companions. We are grateful that we do not have to go home with nothing to look forward to but a quiet, solitary, lonely, and disconnected evening with ourselves as our only company. As thou hast so rightly said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Forgive us for being so quick to judge un-righteously and for assuming the very worst—that it was only about sexual acts. We are so grateful that thou doest not treat us in like manner—always assuming the worst.

We have, then, come to understand that it is not “homo-sexuality” that so many feel, but homo-“attraction,” or, better, *same-gender* attraction. What a difference this understanding makes!

So, again, O Lord, let us advocate for our gay brothers and sisters, even those who marry. Have we been and are we now on the verge of perpetuating a very common human error? Have we and are we now defining individuals, and limiting thy relation with them, based upon one single criteria? Have we and are we now in the process of creating a leper class?

We remember the leper, O Lord. We remember their heavy life of alienation and disenfranchisement. We remember the demand that they live each day thinking, feeling, and announcing for all to hear, “Unclean, Unclean, Unclean” without any consideration to the rich goodness that also resided in those same individuals. We remember that they were made to feel as if they were no better than human dung before thee. Oh, what an awful burden Old Testament teachings and procedures placed upon these poor individuals—individuals who were in need of the very first and best of blessings.

Why was the leper, so kind to his mother and father, for example, not made to walk each day thinking, feeling, and announcing, “Gentle and Kind, Gentle and Kind, Gentile and Kind”!?! What fear-induced small-mindedness and ungodly bigotry allowed such evil to exist, not once or twice, not here and there, but everywhere for a thousand years! Oh, what suffering is not deserved for such unnecessary pain as was inflicted upon the leper? But, we believe that even here, thy mercy will astound us.

We remember, too, how thy Son, Jesus, acted so very, very differently. We remember how he embraced the leper, entering into his life, attaching himself to him, committing himself to him, putting the lie to the declaration, “Unclean, unclean, unclean.”

So it is with our gay brothers and sisters. We feel, rightly or wrongly, that they have made choices of which thou dost not approve. Yet, we know for certain that they, in many instances, act in ways that are very right and quite good before thee. They are often most holy. Must they be defined, as was the Leper, by one flaw—if indeed it be a flaw? Can we not bless them for the goodness that resides in them—a goodness that is often more than commendable, but godly? It seems that to define them only by their attraction, which may be no more than a “difference;” to deny them blessings associated with that attraction and not, at the same time, bless them for the goodness and faith that is in them is inconsistent with what we know of thy character.

Surely, Lord, we can bless and BE a blessing to our gay brothers and sisters, including those who marry and live a life of fidelity toward a beloved companion. But, we need thy help to find our way to this. We need thy help to allay our fears. We need thy help to open our minds and use our prophetic imagination—a divine imagination like that of Abraham. An imagination that seeks to bless where we, with our human weakness and smallness can only see reason to curse.

Now, the difficulty of knowing how to bless and BE a blessing to gay men and women is difficult enough. But now the difficulty of how to bless and BE a blessing to their children has arisen. Some of our gay brothers and sisters have children born through various and sundry means—some of them through the miracles of modern science. Some of them have adopted children who might, otherwise, live without the love of a committed parent. We marvel, frankly, that, though excommunicated from and disenfranchised by thy Church, many of these gay married couples remain firm in their testimony of thy Church and Gospel. For example, they continue to believe in the utility and power of thy holy priesthood. Their faith in thy priesthood leads them to hope that their children can be blessed, baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit as a needed guide in life.

Now, we feel some hesitancy about blessing such children. For example, when we bless children, “a membership record is created.” For a number of reasons, both in relation to the children themselves and the members of wards and stakes among whom they live, we have some concern about creating such a record. Perhaps this is small of us. Perhaps thou would counsel us to think outside this very small box. But, with this, our concern in mind, O Lord, we ask, “*Who says a blessing necessitates the creation of a membership record?*” Is this an essential principle of the blessing that, if divorced from the blessing, would deny the Divine will and violate some eternal law? Might we not bless a child without creating a membership record? Might we not bless for

the sake of blessing?

We have this much in common with our gay brothers and sisters. Like them, O Lord, we believe in the utility of a priesthood blessing, especially one uttered over an innocent infant. Who knows what inspired blessings thou might choose to pronounce upon the innocent—some of them, perhaps, even babes called and chosen for some great end—blessings that might serve as a guide to them and their parents throughout their life.

In fact, O Lord, we find ourselves astonished to find that in being forced to ask questions about such difficult issues; ask questions that we would not otherwise have asked, the vision of our responsibility to bless and BE a blessing has expanded.

We have asked ourselves, “Why do we not bless *more* children?

Why have we not previously considered, pondered, prayed, and planned how our commission to be a blessing to all the families of the earth might be expanded to include all thy children, member and non-member alike—whether they affirm all that we affirm or not?

Why haven’t we invited, as Jesus did, ALL to bring their innocent children to us to be blessed by the holy priesthood?

What impact might this have, not only upon the children themselves, but upon their parents? Might this not increase parental commitment to their children and to thee throughout the world? Might it not, in the language of Malachi, serve to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers”?¹⁰

Such thoughts, O Lord, have set our hearts aflame with light and joy. Our minds seem almost too slow to keep up with the immense potentialities. It seems now, to us, that our previous reason for withholding a child’s blessing from so many—“because a membership record is created”—came from a darkened, retracted, and crimped mind.

Now, again, O Lord, if we are being too broad in our desires to bless, please forgive. Show us the error of our ways. We will humbly accept thy correction. But for now, we do risk advocacy of our poor gay brothers and sisters along with their children.

¹⁰ Malachi 4.⁶

Can't we bless their children, even if that babe *is* the only innocent member of the family?

Wouldn't it be better to adjust a traditional, likely a non-essential procedure, so that our goodwill allows us to keep the ear of the gay couple, keep the ear of the child, and have at least a chance at converting them all? We know the power thy word can have, especially when multiplied week after week. We know by long and wonderful experiences that "the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul."¹¹ Who knows the impact it might have on parents and child alike?

If we must curse and offend, we must. But, isn't there a way to be true to principle and, at the same time, bless the individual? It seems to us that there might be. And so we ask, we propose—let us do something. Let us do just a simple and seemingly harmless little thing. Let us make these two proposals.

1. Let us direct that the children of gay couples, however those children have come into the home, may be blessed without the creation of a membership record.
2. Let us explore how we, like thy Son during his earthly ministry and again during his post-resurrection ministry among the Nephites, can extend the invitation to all the families of the earth to bring their little ones so that they can be blessed by Thy holy priesthood.

We believe that with thy help we can teach our members concerning their, and our, first and essential responsibility to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. We believe that we, like Abraham, can do so without confusion or without seeming to compromise true principles. Please, please, please, let us be a blessing to such brothers and sisters. If not this way, another way that seems better to thee. We are open to thy counsel.

Oh Lord, we do not understand all things. We do not understand why people feel as they do. We do not understand why some have this attraction to the same gender. We are sensitive and humble about the challenges they face. We have asked them to not engage in sexual activity. We have forbidden them to marry. We have asked them to live perpetual celibate lives. We acknowledge, O Lord, the difficulty of this. We confess that we ourselves, at 20 or 25 or 30 years old would have been hard pressed to keep such an onerous mandate. We are not certain we could have abided such an unnatural stricture. We ourselves would likely have failed to live such a lifestyle, thus bringing Church discipline upon ourselves. We do fear that we have "put a yoke upon

¹¹ Psalms 19.⁷

the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we [would be] able to bear?”¹²

But more difficult yet than the sexual celibacy we have demanded, we have demanded the companionless life that we have already addressed and that we ourselves could not abide; that man was not created to abide.

Please, please, please, O Lord, allow us to apply this small drop of balm to the grievous soul-wound that pains those who experience this same-gender attraction. Let us offer this balm to gay parents. Let us, in fact, offer this balm to parents throughout the world. Help us find a way to do it such that it is consistent with and reveals thy divine character and thy irresistible will; that it might indeed “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” and that it bring glory and honor to thy Holy Name.

If we err, nay, *when* we err, we appeal to thy knowledge of us—that we try to do right; that we seek only this, to glorify thee, and assist thee in glorifying thy children. But far, far more than this, we appeal to thy love, thy mercy and thy grace which is higher and wider and longer and broader than even we have understood and experienced. Help us see if and how, even in our latest desires for additional grace, we have come short of where thou would have us be.

O magnify us to be more like thee!

¹² Acts 15.¹⁰